DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 067 621 CS 000 157

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TITLE Approaches to Beginning Reading.
PUB DATE May 72
NOTE 14p.; Speech given at the Annual Convention of the International Reading Assn. (17th, Detroit, May 10-13, 1972)

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.65 HC-$3.29
DESCRIPTORS *Beginning Reading; *Motivation; *Reading Instruction; Reading Materials; *Teaching Techniques; Textbooks

ABSTRACT

The more than one hundred approaches to initial reading instruction can be grouped under ten headings: basal reader, phonemics, phonemic reading, "linguistics," total language arts, language-experience, one-to-one sound symbol, individualized reading, early reading, and perceptual discrimination. Although the basal reader approach is used in more than 90 percent of American elementary schools, selected techniques identified with the other approaches can provide alternative and supplementary day-to-day strategies. These borrowed techniques can do much to increase students' motivation to learn to read: imaginative phonics drill (key pictures, phonics charts, every pupil response, "Soundie" stories, personification), "write and see" workbooks, rebus reading, color clues, word shapes, language experiences, and student-owned books. (RD)

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# APPROACHES TO BEGINNING READING

Beginning Reading Session
Woodward Room Sheraton-Cadillac
Friday, May 12, 1972 3-4 p.m.

It would seem logical that, after more than one thousand years of reading in the English language, there would be one standard means for transmitting the beginning skills of reading from one generation to children of the next generation. But the almost countless combinations of variables of heredity, environment, and motivation militate against such a simplistic, unitary approach to beginning reading. Moreover, lack of definitive knowledge of the chemical-electrical-protein components of the learning process, itself, prevents us from certainty of the means and manner in which learning occurs.

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And the acquisition of reading skills is, perhaps, the most fundamental of academic learnings.

## The Search for An Approach to Beginning Reading

The passing of the centuries have seen a parade of strategies, each minimally serving the needs of its day and then passing into limbo with the advent of a "new" system that was heralded as the precurser of the millenium in reading. No doubt early reading techniques in English were copied from the monotonous Latin intonations by medieval monks. Rote repetition was assumed to assure memorization--hence, learning. Elocution was the dimension added by Nineteenth century pedagogues. And we of the Twentieth century are witnessing a veritable carnival of performers--ranging from those who prescribe a mix of flash cards and Pablum for 9-month-old babies to the magicians who supervise creeping and crawling as the latest form of educational witchcraft.

## One Hundred Approaches to Beginning Reading

There are, in fact, more than one hundred approaches to beginning reading! Among them there are certainly a number of alternatives to a single methodological and/or materials approach.

For expediency, it is helpful to consider ten classifications into which they might be divided:

1. The Basal Reader Approach

There are at present at least fifteen series that are adequately structured and fully developed to qualify as basal readers. Some are minimal, but most are quite extensive. Their

common feature is the structured and controlled manner in which the difficulty of materials is "graded" or arranged in levels.

The fact that more than 90% of America's elementary schools start their children on the reading path by means of a basal reader obviates the necessity of definition or further discussion here on basal readers as the major approach to beginning reading.

The other approaches to beginning reading are much less known; moreover, their numbers and diversity are most confusing. It is among them that we find alternatives.

2. Phonemics Approaches

Under this heading it is useful to classify all materials and methods that emphasize phonetic decoding and phonemic synthesizing as their chief objectives.

3. Phonemic Reading Approaches

Whereas pure phonemic pronunciation approaches are concerned with pronunciation as the end product, a phonemic reading approach would include reading materials for reinforcement of the phonetic element being taught.

4. "Linguistics" Approaches

A "linguistics" approach is, of course, phonemic as well. The control of new learning elements, the introduction of only one new increment at a time, and the concentration on regular phonemic elements are features of those approaches that might be classified under this heading.

5. Total Language-Arts Approaches

Those systems that simultaneously make use of listening, dramatizing, reading, spelling, and writing are members of this group.

6. Language-Experience Approaches

Any approach that captures the stories children tell and makes them available for all to read is a language-experience approach.

7. One-to-One Sound-Symbol Approach

A system that provides one special visual cue for each of the forty-four sounds of American English is a one-to-one sound-symbol approach.

8. Invidualized Reading

Like so many innovations, individualized reading has been corrupted and perverted by many until it may mean many different things. Its chief feature is the self-selection of books by individuals, the assumption being that the books selected in freedom will be relevant to the interests and needs of the individual. Hence, they will be self-motivating.

9. Early Reading Approaches

Approaches that claim to assist very young pre-school children are classified under this heading.

10. Perceptual Discrimination Approaches

For generations, good kindergartens have been using perceptual discrimination strategies as readiness for auditory and visual work in reading. More recently, a number of structured materials have appeared, each purporting to be a new perceptual discrimination approach to beginning reading.

Making Use of Alternatives

Exciting fun can be brought into the day-to-day strategies for teaching beginning reading. Here are some suggestions:

Phonics Drill

Phonics drill can be and often is a dismal exercise in rote memorization. How else does one learn phoneme-grapheme correspondences except by rote memorization? There is absolutely no meaning inherent in a letter symbol and/or a letter sound. But repetitious drill can be fun. Here are some possibilities:

Key Pictures

Use some of the excellent picture cards that have been developed to serve as cues to the sounds of letters. Associative learning is the psychological principle involved.

READING WITH PHONICS -- that little hard-back originally done by Julie Hay and Charles Wingo exactly thirty years ago--now includes up-dated and very vivid full-color key pictures:

The a = apple is a GREAT BIG RED APPLE. The elephant is a fun circus performer; the Indian has a full-color head-dress, etc. There are 25 large cards available from Lippincott, the publishers.

The SULLIVAN DECODING KIT FROM BRL; FIRST EXPERIENCES WITH VOWELS AND CONSONANTS (from McGraw-Hill's Instructo Division); and DECODING GAMES, published by Multi Media, are three other sources for excellent and relevant picture cards that are fun to use.

It is also fun for a teacher and her class to make their own picture cards. Mrs. Gladys Sims Stump suggests three-dimensional objects mounted on heavy art board at least 14" x 17". Small plastic objects purchased at the dime store are mounted and the letter and

key word are printed in large manuscript. Children can help--and become enthusiastically involved.-- in the creation of sets of these three dimensional "PILOT CARDS".

A few examples will suffice: jet, bird, gum, fish, rocket, nail, television, lollipop, basket, bug, ladder, zig-zag. And for the blends consider: flag, clock, plate, tractor, crayon, string, and screw.

Phonics Charts

Large classroom-size charts are available for those who prefer having all of the phoneme-grapheme correspondences together for application of the psychological principle of similarity and contrast.

The two PHONOVISUAL CHARTS are very popular and and are easy to use for whole-class and for small group instruction. 8½ x11 sheets on which the large charts are reduced are also available for individual seat work. The PHONOVISUAL SYSTEM starts with the consonants... The drill that accompanies the pointing to the chart proceeds like this:

p = pig; wh = wheel; f = fan; th = three;

t = top; s = saw; sh = ship; ch=cherry; k = key;

h = horn

Some "experts" deride whole-class mass instruction in phonics drill. The reason usually given is that "those who know their phonics do all the performing and those who need the drill just sit." Another more recent theme is: "Teach to each child's needs."

Admittedly, these are both very valid reasons for not engaging in mass phonics drill. Yet there are times when a teacher and the class can have fun working together.

Every Pupil Response

Here are some ways it can be done, and still maintain at least minimal individualization: -

The first method should be credited to Dr. Donald D. Durrell at B.U. He has just recently retired after thirty years. His major interest has been in getting every pupil involvement. He calls this; "High Intensity" learning...as opposed to "Low Intensity"--where ONE child goes to the board, or chart, and points or responds or answers a question while the other 24 sit.

Durrell's SPEECH-TO-PRINT Phonics provides for High Intensity whole-class responses: It is a box (smaller than SRA) of flash cards...and individualized pupil-response cards.

Suppose the teacher is working on consonant blends: BL and BR: Each pupil is handed two small response cards...one printed with BR... one with BL. The teacher pronounces words, and each child holds up the card representing the consonant blend that he thinks he hears. Every pupil response cards can also be "YES" and "NO". With every pupil responding, the teacher can easily see who is uncertain...who is copying the responses of others... and who are those who are in control of those two phonic elements. The class is having fun together, and, at the same time, the response is individualized.

Another "fun" routine with the entire class was developed by Dr. Louise Binder Scott. It is the "Soundie" stories. I am not sure that Dr. Scott actually originated the Soundie Stories... they seem to me to be the type of thing good teachers have been doing for generations.

Her "Soundie" is a little elf who goes about collecting sounds from the environment: the wind, the little mouse sound, saw, the snake, etc. As the teacher relates the story, the children wait in expectation

of producing the sound (in unison) whenever the appropriate places permit.

You can find the "Soundie" stories in the teachers manual of TIME FOR PHONICS...and you can probably make up your own more up-to-date and more relevant stories.

Personification

Another set of FUN activities is packaged under the name: ALPHA ONE -- BREAKING THE CODE. It is published by New Dimensions in Education.

ALPHA ONE consists of a kit of hand puppets, 3-D pictures, filmstrips, recordings, and most important, the psychedelic alphabet characters: LETTER PEOPLE. 21 Boys and 5 girls. The girls are the vowels. Women's Lib is up in arms...for part of the routine is that the boys (consonants) won't let the girls in to play unless the girls promise to conform and be subservient. There are all sorts of clues in their code-breaking system. But the fun things that children like are the Letter-people rhymes...that children memorize just like they do the TV commercials:

A junky jewl or junky toy
Makes Mr. J. jump for joy.
Anything that's thrown away,
Is a joy for JUMBLED J.

They had to change that one...because it soon became apparent that using the word "JUNKY" is out!

Workbooks

Every youngster likes the magic of invisible ink. Capitalizing on that, Appleton-Century-Crofts has published a set of phonics

workbooks called WRITE AND SEE. The child uses a special marking pen and the invisible ink shows up and gives him immediate feedback... a BOLD STRIPED LINE if he has marked the correct box...a grey line if he has marked the wrong answer.

Many of us recall the fun we had trying to decipher those pages of reading in which there were interspersed part-word - part-pictures. Those puzzle-reading pages appeared frequently in some of our childhood magazines. This is called "rebus" reading...from the Latin, meaning, "reading by things". The psychological principle is discovery learning.

The higher the intelligence, the more challenging are the rebus pages. These afford a fun alternative in beginning reading. I am suggesting that the teacher develop fun pages of reading with a rebus character interspersed frequently enough to create interest and challenge. It is great practice in structural analysis skills development. You can do this by taking a story and substituting a rebus for a word or part of a combined word.

Pictures

Another effective procedure for reinforcing phonics discrimination skill is the following:

After teaching two phonics elements...using the psychological principle of contrast, have the children draw picturas of objects whose names begin with the phonemic sounds and graphemes. For example---using the BR and BL examples again---ask the children if they would like to draw pictures of things that begin with BR and BL...and assure them they will have an opportunity of showing their pictures to the class or group to see if the other children can guess the beginning sounds or graphemes they represent.

Linguistics

Linguistics, so-called, is another area in which there are alternatives to dismal phonics drill. Brighter students enjoy constructing sentences of linguistically-regular words. They can dream up gems such as this:

Yeh, Man, dig Sam's mod pad!

or

Mac's Pub sells jugs to lugs.

or

Quick, Dick...

See the Sick Chick.

Dick, see the chick.

Sick, sick, chick.

Dick, Dick, see the tick on the sick, sick chick!

Flick the tick from the sick, sick chick.

Quick, Dick, Flick the tick from the sick, sick chick.

Dick flicks the tick from the sick, sick chick.

Flick, Flick, Flick!

Slick...slick!

Not all First graders can do this, by any means...but some are brilliant and creative. They enjoy the challenge of constructing linguistically-regular sentences.

Color Clues

Several approaches to beginning reading utilize visual color clues that add one more sensory dimension to the learning process and employ the psychological principles of intensity and visual clues.

The workbooks in the STRUCTURAL READING SERIES (by Gertrude Stern--published by Random House) provide GHOST type -- faintly visible...and then they print the consonants in blue and the vowels in red for whichever phonemic element is being studied.

We are all acquainted with WORDS IN COLOR...with its 21 charts, and 47 colors and shades. It is a much more complicated system, and requires considerable training, vigor, and constant teacher domination to make it work.

Word Shapes

Gestalt psychologists, over the years, have attempted to apply some of the principles of pattern learning, known as figure-ground relationships. These usually emerge as visual-perceptual-discrimination exercises in which word forms or word shapes are used as cues. Printed in lower-case type, the word look has a very different shape than the word Mary. Drawing boxes around words that have the same shape can be a productive visual discrimination exercise, PROVIDED you as the teacher make up lists of words or sentences in which the two words do not have the same form and shape. You must make up work-sheets with the same word repeated many times. Suppose you are providing reinforcement for the work look: You would type with a PRIMARY typewriter. You would type a story...or just a page of words...using the word look many times. Every time the child came to the word look he would draw a box around it.

Now, here is a new variation that utilizes the psychological principal of cue reduction:

As the activity progresses and the child procedes down the page, you have schemed to drop out one of the letters in look. He must

fill in the blank and then draw his box around it. Later on, you drop out two letters...replacing them with underlined dashes. The child must fill them in and draw the box around the whole word. In this way, then he adds one more factor---the parts...to what heretofore has been whole-shape visual discrimination only.

Language-Experiences

Language-experience activities have been popular in Kindergarten for many years. They have a definite place in the beginning reading program, too.

The underlying principle is that one's OWN SELF experiences are the most INDIVIDUALIZED basis for learning. They are SELF CENTERD... SELF DIRECTED...They are relevant to SELF.

Those who have read Sylvia Ashton-Warner's book TEACHER, know that she utilized this very basic principle of psychology in teaching beginning reading (in English) to the Maori children of New Zealand. Because of thier environment she discovered that the feelings of fear and hate and love were the keys to the inner self.

Here, now, is one way we can capture these self-centered feelings. It is done by encouraging each child to paint pictures of people expressing intense feelings. This is, admittedly, highly abstract. But, it is also extremely personalized...individualized. By its very nature, each child's picture is different. His story that accompanies his picture is an expression of his own inner feelings. Some children cannot represent abstract feelings in a picture. But, for those who can, this is the most individualized approach to beginning reading.

Once they start to do this, they build whole books of language-experience stories...illustrated by them, printed out by you with fine point felt pen until such time as they can write the words by themselves. And that time comes very fast...for it is so self-motivated.

A daily news bulletin board is an excellent means for individualizing beginning reading. It, too, is a language-experience medium.

Often, the feature story is exclusively that of one child. It is HIS special story. And, believe me, he makes giant efforts to read it.

One way to reinforce his reading of his own special story is to reproduce it reduced in size in carefully-printed manuscript or on primary typewriter so he can read and re-read it at his seat. And he probably will want to take it home. Let him take it home when he can read it by himself...but be sure to give him lots of help and support. Help him succeed.

Children's Literature

Children's own story books are another bridge in individualizing beginning reading instruction. In communities where parents do purchase books for their children, the children should be encouraged to bring them to school where you can reinforce the feeling of the value of the book, and can enhance the feeling of self-esteem by reading that particular child's book to the class or to his own group. He becomes important as a book owner...He, consequently, is moved a giant step toward books and toward reading...This, too, is so very personal... so individualized.

We have heard it said so often...Reading IS GETTING MEANING FROM THE PRINTED PAGE. That is total nonsense! This is absolutely counter to the basic principle of psychology. All learning is based on past experience!

There is absolutely NO MEANING on a printed page. The meaning comes wholely from within...it springs from the wells of experience of each individual.

Conclusions

From the one hundred or more approaches to beginning reading, the creative teacher can select those that serve her purposes best; those that fill the individual needs of various children; those that add the fun dimension to the process of learning to read. In one hundred approaches to beginning reading, there certainly is something for everyone, and there is fun for all.